

What is Management?

Introduction

Many health professionals are required to perform management tasks, sometimes in addition to their other professional tasks. Even if they are not necessarily called a *manager* in their job descriptions, they co-ordinate, guide, plan and supervise activities, people or processes. They may not think of themselves as managers, but may well be doing the job of a manager.

It is not easy to prepare people for the job of manager. Managers carry out a number of different activities, fulfil a number of different roles, and are faced with a variety of problems. However, one way of helping to prepare managers for their jobs is to help them gain a better understanding of the nature of a manager's job. In this session we examine various definitions of management and then look at the nature of the manager's job in terms of activities and roles.

WHAT IS MANAGEMENT?

It is not easy to define management. Many definitions have been suggested, for example:

Management is:

- Getting things done.
- Saying what needs to be done and getting it done.
- Getting people to work harmoniously together and making efficient use of resources to achieve objectives.
- Planning, organising, directing and controlling: the art of getting things done by and through people (WHO, 1993: 5).
- A systematic process of using resources with judgement, to achieve objectives.
- "... Good management is to organisation what health is to the body – the smooth functioning of all its parts ..." (McMahon et al, 1992: 3)

TASK 1 - Defining management

- a) Which definition do you prefer and why do you like it?
- b) Write your own definition of management that applies to your situation.
- c) Think about your job and identify the things you do which involve management. Use the definitions to guide you.

FEEDBACK

The WHO definition, “getting things done through people”, is used as a theme throughout this health management module. This definition was chosen because we want to emphasise that management consists of two equally important concepts:



While it is necessary to ensure that things get done, the manager should never forget that without people, nothing will get done!

WHAT DO MANAGERS DO?

The activities of a health manager

Margaret is the health manager for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) serving two large refugee camps in Tanzania. She has overall responsibility for the provision of health services in these camps. We asked her to write down all the activities that make up her job.

Margaret's job as a health manager includes:

“Supervising six programme managers; receiving, checking, interpreting and acting upon health statistical reports; writing reports to donors; managing the health programme budget; preparing the budget for the following year; planning new projects; preparing project proposals; arguing for resources for health; preparing orders for drugs and equipment; finding and contacting suppliers; keeping track of orders; checking the quality of newly arrived stock; approving distribution of drugs and equipment; getting equipment fixed; supervision of the medical stores; organising a transport schedule; getting approval for transport usage by the health team;

approving leave requests; arranging referrals; determining staffing needs; recruiting and hiring staff; disciplining and firing staff; sorting out conflict among staff; designing a new medical stores complex and new camp hospital; supervising staff development and training opportunities; establishing a medical library; contingency planning; arranging for transport of bodies; arranging burials; buying shrouds; managing a blood bank; organising work schedules; sweeping the floor; tidying the office; cleaning refrigerators; fixing computer printers; listening to complaints; liaising with donors and other organisations; representing the NGO at community meetings; helping researchers; taking care of visitors; running staff meetings; responding to staff requests and problems.”

Margaret’s job is challenging. It consists of many varied activities, ranging from large tasks with a high level of responsibility, to duties which are small and uninteresting but nevertheless essential to the smooth functioning of the programme.

TASK 2 - Examining your activities as a manager

Using Margaret’s job as an example, make a list of all the management activities or tasks that make up your job.

FEEDBACK

There will be differences and similarities between your activities and those described by Margaret. Each management job will have its own requirements, but all management jobs will probably have this in common: the job will include a wide variety of activities.

Management jobs also vary greatly in scope, from the management of a hospital with hundreds of employees to the management of a health post with three staff members; or from the management of a health district to the management of a family planning project.

Even within the same job, there may be wide scope: sometimes being a manager involves making difficult decisions, like approving the purchase of an expensive piece of equipment or having to discipline a staff member; but sometimes being a manager means listening patiently to a junior staff member’s problem, or trying to fix a printer, or helping to unload a truck, or sweeping the floor if this is what needs to be done!

There are many different kinds of managers in the health care sector, but the purpose of all the different jobs is similar: to provide high quality health services to those who need them. Managers have to carry out a wide range of activities and use a variety of skills and knowledge. Although all management jobs are different, there are skills which are common to many jobs - regardless of the level of the manager or the type of work involved. We will explore some of these important skills as we progress through this module.

The roles of a manager

In order to be effective as a manager, it is first of all necessary to understand exactly what is required of you in your job.

One of the difficulties of a manager's job is that it may seem like a rather large muddle of different activities necessary for simply keeping things up and running. A manager was once described as someone who "... does one damn thing after another!" Sometimes the sheer number of activities required of the manager may seem almost overwhelming.

In the light of this, it is helpful to look for patterns amongst the activities so that similar activities can be grouped together. Each group of activities may be seen as representing a different role within the manager's job. Perhaps because the meaning of management is difficult to pin down, researchers have attempted to understand management work by identifying the different roles that make up a manager's job. Henry Mintzberg (Handy, 1993: 322) studied the jobs of a group of senior managers. He was able to fit all the managers' varied activities into ten quite different roles.

Furthermore, he grouped the ten roles into three key areas:

Key Areas	Roles
Engaging in interpersonal contact	1. Figurehead 2. Leader 3. Liaison person
Processing information	4. Monitor 5. Disseminator 6. Spokesperson
Making decisions	7. Entrepreneur 8. Disturbance handler 9. Resource allocator 10. Negotiator

“... **Interpersonal** roles cover the relationships that a manager has to have with others. The three roles that a manager has to have within this category are figurehead, leader and liaison. Managers have to act as *figureheads* because of their formal authority and symbolic position, representing their organizations. As *leaders*, managers have to bring together the needs of an organization and those of the individuals under their command. The third interpersonal role, that of *liaison*, deals with the horizontal relationships which work-activity studies have shown to be important for a manager. A manager has to maintain a network of relationships outside the organization.

Managers have to collect, disseminate and transmit information and have three corresponding **informational** roles, namely monitor, disseminator and spokesperson. A manager is an important person in *monitoring* what goes on in the organization, receiving information about both external and internal events, and transmitting it to others. This process of transmission is the *dissemination* role, passing on information of both a factual and value kind. A manager often has to give information concerning the organization to outsiders, taking on the role of *spokesperson* to both the general public and those in positions of influence.

As with so many writers about management, Mintzberg regards the most crucial part of managerial activity as that concerned with **making decisions**. The four roles that he places in this category are based on different classes of decision, namely, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator. As *entrepreneurs* [an entrepreneur is someone who finds new ways of doing things], managers make decisions about changing what is happening in an organization. They may have to both initiate change and take an active part in deciding exactly what is to be done. In principle, they are acting voluntarily. This is very different from their role as *disturbance handler*, where managers have to make decisions which arise from events beyond their control and unpredicted. The ability to react to events as well as to plan activities is seen as an important managerial skill in Mintzberg's eyes.

The *resource allocation role* of a manager is central to much organizational analysis. Clearly a manager has to make decisions about the allocation of money, people, equipment, time and so on. Mintzberg points out that in doing so a manager is actually scheduling time, programming work and authorizing actions. The *negotiation role* is put in the decisional category by Mintzberg because ... a manager has to negotiate with others and in the process make decisions about the commitment of organizational resources ...” (Pugh & Hickson, 1989: 12-13)

TASK 3 - Examining your roles as a manager

List the ten roles that Mintzberg identifies and then try to group the job activities you listed into these roles. (Not all managers play all roles, so do not worry if you think you only play some of the roles. You may find that some activities fit into more than one role). Have you identified any role which you fulfil but which does not fit into Mintzberg’s categories?

FEEDBACK

Your answers will be individual, but compare them with the grouping of Margaret’s activities into Mintzberg’s ten roles:

Figurehead:	Representing the NGO at community meetings.
Leader:	Supervising the six programme managers; supervising of the medical stores.
Liaison:	Liaising with donors and other organisations.
Monitor:	Receiving, checking, interpreting and acting upon health statistical reports; keeping track of orders; checking the quality of newly arrived stock.
Disseminator:	Writing reports to donors.
Spokesperson:	Arguing for health resources in general management meetings.
Entrepreneur:	Planning new projects; preparing project proposals; preparing orders for drugs and equipment; finding and contacting suppliers.
Disturbance handler:	Sorting out conflict among staff; getting equipment fixed.
Resource allocator:	Approving distribution of drugs and equipment; managing the health programme budget; preparing the budget for the following year; determining staffing needs.
Negotiator:	Arguing for resources for health; getting approval for transport use by the health team.

After considering Mintzberg’s list and the management activities that make up your own job, it should be clear to you that as a manager you will need to fulfil a wide range of roles and perhaps be expected to have an equally wide range of skills. Every manager will also be faced with deciding how much time and importance to give to the different roles at different times.

PRIORITISING MANAGEMENT ROLES

We have seen that a manager has to juggle a number of different roles at the same time. Although some people may feel that one role is more important than another, this will vary from job to job and even from time to time in the same job. However, the allocation of time to different roles may be critical to the success of a manager's work. Explore how much time you allocate to your various management roles in the task below.

TASK 4 - Prioritising your management roles

- a) Refer to the list where you grouped your activities under Mintzberg's roles and estimate what percentage (%) of your time you spend on each role. Write this down in the table below e.g. Monitor: 20%. Remember that the sum of all your roles should be equal to 100%.
- b) Now that you have thought about how your time is allocated, think critically about the time and importance you give to the different roles in your job and answer these questions:
 - Which roles receive too much emphasis and which ones receive too little? Mark them + for too much time, and – for too little.
 - How could you improve on the time allocated to the different roles? Would it help if you used your time in a different way, or if you assigned some of the activities or roles to competent people on your staff?

Role	% of your time spent
Figurehead	
Leader	
Liaison person	
Monitor	
Disseminator	
Spokesperson	
Entrepreneur	
Disturbance handler	
Resource allocator	
Negotiator	

FEEDBACK

There are many ways of changing your allocation of time, but the first step is to become conscious of how you are using it. Simply by doing this exercise, you have taken the first step. This is a very important sort of self-evaluation as a manager and you will return to it in the next session, where we will address the issue of balancing the time you give to the different roles in your job.

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we explored different definitions of management. Hopefully you will have recognised that many of us fulfil managerial roles without being called *the manager*. You should also have developed a possible framework for organising your activities as a manager in terms of roles, and for evaluating how much time you spend on each role. You have also hopefully developed your understanding of the varied roles played by a manager.

Finally, you may have recognised that to do all the things a manager has to do, you will also have to manage yourself!

In the next session we will look at some ways in which you can better manage yourself in order to better manage the people and the tasks for which you are responsible.